THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON DC 20350-1000

January 15, 2026

MEMORANDUM FOR CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY (MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS)

SUBJECT: Department of the Navy Guidance to Restore Honor to Sailors and Marines Separated Under the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccine Mandate

References: (a) Executive Order 14184, "Reinstating Service Members Discharged Under the Military's COVID-19 Vaccination Mandate," January 27, 2025
(b) Secretary of War Memorandum, "Restoring Honor to Service Members Separated Under the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccine Mandate," December 6, 2025
(c) Office of the Under Secretary of War for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, "Guidance to Restore Honor to Service Members Separated Under the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccine," December 10, 2025
(d) SECNAV M-5420.1, "Discharge Review Board Manual," September 29, 2020
(e) 32 CFR Part 724, Naval Discharge Board
(f) 10 U.S.C. § 1553, Review of Discharge or Dismissal
(g) SECNAVINST 5420.174E, "Naval Discharge Review Board," September 29, 2020
(h) Secretary of Defense Memorandum, "Providing Supplemental Remedies for Service Members and Veterans Negatively Impacted by the Department of Defense Defunct Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Mandate," April 23, 2025
(i) Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, "Supplemental Guidance to the Military Department Discharge Review Boards and Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records Considering Requests from Service Members Adversely Impacted by Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Requirements," May 7, 2025
(j) Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) Memorandum, "Supplemental Guidance to the Board for Correction of Naval Records and Council of Review Boards Considering Requests Involving Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Requirements," July 29, 2025

Pursuant to references (a) through (c), this memorandum provides guidance for the Department of the Navy (DON) to implement the proactive review of the records of Sailors and Marines who were involuntarily discharged solely for refusing to take the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccine.

No later than 30 January 2026, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) and Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) will forward the validated list, per reference (c) to the Director,

Secretary of the Navy Council of Review Boards (DIRSECNAVCORB), who will then transmit it to the President, Naval Discharge Review Board (NDRB). CNO and CMC will also provide any additional data, requested by the DIRSECNAVCORB, necessary for the NDRB to accomplish this review within the timelines established by references (b) and (c).

CNO and CMC will provide data that includes service record and demographic information as specified by DIRSECNAVCORB, including, but not limited to, identifying former personnel who were subject to discipline, such as a record of non-judicial punishment or a court-martial.[1] This information must be transmitted in digital format and will encompass all available and relevant official military personnel file data necessary for the NDRB to meet its requirements for reviews contained in references (d) and (e); this includes applicable demographic details, which should be provided in data fields. The digital transmission of this information ensures the accuracy and completeness of the review process.

To facilitate the timely collection and transfer of this data, CNO, CMC, and DIRSECNAVCORB will each designate a subject matter expert. Experts designated by CNO and CMC will be responsible for ensuring that all necessary data are gathered and transmitted to DIRSECNAVCORB in accordance with the stringent time requirements specified in references (b) and (c), thereby ensuring that the review process remains on track. To ensure the timely collection and transfer of these data, DIRSECNAVCORB may request additional information from the CNO and CMC experts as necessary, and will specify the preferred method and mode of data transfer, ensuring that all information is provided in a secure and efficient manner. As the responsible activity, DIRSECNAVCORB may provide further guidance to CNO and CMC on the collection and transfer of data, setting expectations and requirements to ensure consistency and compliance for this proactive review.

Upon receipt of a validated list and digital information above, the NDRB, on its own motion, will, within one calendar year of reference (b), review the records of eligible former Sailors and Marines for a discharge upgrade. In doing so, the NDRB will review the records pursuant to the requirements of references (d) through (j). This review shall be conducted solely as a documentary review by a three-member NDRB panel, with no in-person hearings or additional procedural steps. The review will be limited to examining the characterization of service, narrative reason for separation, Separation Program Designator (SPD) codes, and Reentry (RE) codes of each eligible individual. The NDRB will not review any other issues related to the individual's service or discharge, including administrative errors, as part of this review. Consistent with reference (c), the NDRB is hereby excused from the obligation to notify the individual concerned of the specific date on which his or her case will be reviewed.

On a continuous basis, and in accordance with section 105 of reference (f), the NDRB will forward its findings for each eligible former Sailor and Marine to CMC and the Commander, Navy Personnel Command (CNPC). The NDRB will not forward its findings to eligible individuals. CMC and CNPC will implement and notify individual Sailors and Marines of the NDRB's decision within their respective services. As part of this process, CMC and CNPC will

[1] NDRB will provide a list to CNO and CMC of individuals who have already applied for and received an upgrade due to refusal to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. CNO and CMC will cross-check their lists of eligible individuals and remove from their lists any individual whose discharge has already been upgraded to Honorable.

facilitate the collection and verification of current addresses for all former Sailors and Marines who receive a discharge upgrade. To ensure privacy and avoid inadvertent disclosure of personally identifiable information contained on the Discharge from Active Duty Form (DD Form 214), the notification letters will include instructions on how to obtain NDRB decisional documents. These notification letters will not contain any sensitive documents or information that, if sent to the wrong address, could lead to a breach of privacy.

CNO and CMC will provide active and/or reserve component manpower support to ensure the NDRB can accomplish this proactive review of records within one calendar year of reference (b) without adversely impacting NDRB or any other DIRSECNAVCORB operation. Due in part to the short-fused nature of this proactive review and consistent with reference (c), remote or telework exceptions are permitted for personnel supporting this proactive review. At a minimum, the manning will consist of a total of 12 personnel: six from each Service, comprising three officers each (paygrades O-4 to O-5) and three enlisted members each (paygrades E-4 to E-6). This manpower support must be in place no later than 2 February 2026 to comply with the requirements of reference (c).

Starting 10 March 2026, and by the fifth day of each month thereafter (starting on 5 April 2026), DIRSECNAVCORB shall submit a report to my office, through the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Manpower and Reserve Affairs), detailing the status of cases referred for review under this initiative. This reporting requirement will continue until all referred individuals have been reviewed by the NDRB. Pursuant to reference (c), the report must include the following information:

- The number of cases identified for referral to the NDRB (this number should remain unchanged after the initial report);
- The number of cases considered by the NDRB;
- The number of cases for which a final decision has been issued and notification sent by the NDRB to CMC and CNPC for notification to the individual concerned;
- The number of individuals granted and denied an upgrade to an Honorable characterization of service, with quantifiable reasons for denials;
- The number of individuals granted and denied an amended narrative reason for separation and associated SPD code, with quantifiable reasons for denials; and
- The number of individuals granted and denied an updated RE Code on the DD Form 214, with quantifiable reasons for denials.

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